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Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Fifth session
Maastricht, the Netherlands, 30 June and 1 July 2014
Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda
Promotion of the Convention and relevant developments and interlinkages: promotion of the Convention's principles in international forums

Draft decision V/4 on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums

Summary

The present document, prepared by the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, sets out a draft decision on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums. In view of its mandate to "make such proposals and recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties as it considers necessary for the achievement of the purposes of the Convention" (ECE/MP.PP/2/Add.15, para. 2 (d)), at its sixteenth meeting (Geneva, 19–21 June 2013), the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention requested the Bureau to prepare a draft decision on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums for its consideration, revision and approval and for subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2013/2, para. 5 (c)).

The document was prepared on the basis of decision IV/3 on the same subject, the outcome of the work undertaken under the auspices of the Working Group on this work area in the current intersessional period and the note by the Chair of the thematic session on public participation in international forums (AC/WGP-16/Inf.5) submitted to the sixteenth meeting of the Working Group.

The document was subsequently distributed to Parties and stakeholders for consultation. The Bureau reviewed the document at its thirty-second meeting (Geneva, 2–3 December 2013) and submitted the draft decision for further consideration and approval by the Working Group at its seventeenth meeting (Geneva, 26–28 February 2014).

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At its seventeenth meeting the Working Group revised and approved, as amended at the meeting, the draft decision on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums (AC/WGP-17/CRP.4)[1] and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration at its fifth session.

[1] Available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/wgp17.html.

The Meeting of the Parties,

Recalling article 3, paragraph 7, of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention),

Recalling also its decisions II/4, III/4 and IV/3 on promoting the principles of the Convention in international forums, decision V/5 on the Strategic Plan for 2015–2020 and decision V/6 on the Work Programme for 2015–2017,

Mindful of the importance of increasing understanding of the challenges faced and the good practices employed by international forums with respect to public participation, through further sharing experience gained under the Convention with international forums,

Welcoming the increasing number of requests from interested international forums seeking expert assistance from the secretariat and Parties on this topic,

Acknowledging the progress made by Parties, international organizations, international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders in promoting the application of the Convention's principles,

Recognizing that expert assistance is an important powerful tool for the promoting the principles of the Convention and sharing the considerable experience accumulated under the Aarhus Convention in an efficient and direct manner,

Also recognizing the valuable work that has been done to implement article 3, paragraph 7, while acknowledging the considerable challenges still to be addressed to fully implement this provision,

1. *Notes with appreciation* the work undertaken under the auspices of the Working Group of the Parties, which has provided a true multi-stakeholder platform for effectively addressing a number of important issues;

2. *Expresses its gratitude* to France for its ongoing leadership of this work area;

3. *Reiterates* its commitment to continue to apply the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in international forums (Almaty Guidelines) (contained in decision II/4) within the activities and subsidiary bodies established under the Convention;

4. *Decides* to continue the work on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums under the authority of the Working Group of the Parties;

5. *Requests* each Party to:

(a) Further actions to promote public participation at the national level regarding international environmental decision-making processes and take appropriate actions within the framework of international organizations in matters relating to the environment, bearing in mind relevant provisions of the Almaty Guidelines;

(b) Interact within and between its ministries to inform officials involved in other relevant international forums about article 3, paragraph 7, of the Convention and the Almaty Guidelines;

(c) Consider innovative ways to improve its own public's access to information and participation in international forums and share their experience with other Parties;

(d) Continue, either individually or in collaboration with other Parties, Signatories or like-minded Governments, to promote the principles of the Convention in the procedures of other international forums and in the work programmes, projects, decisions, instruments and other substantive outputs of those forums whose practices do not presently reflect the Guidelines or the principles of the Convention;

(e) Consider providing expert assistance to other interested Parties, Signatories or Governments on possible good practices to facilitate the public to participate more effectively in international forums, including when hosting important international events;

6. *Requests* the Working Group of the Parties:

(a) To convene regularly, on a needs basis, a thematic session on promoting the principles of the Convention in international forums as an item on the agenda of its meetings with a view to providing opportunities for Parties, Signatories and stakeholders to exchange experiences in the context of promoting the application of the principles of the Convention with respect to those international forums within the definition of paragraph 4 of the Almaty Guidelines identified by Parties or stakeholders to be of particular priority;

(b) If it considers that one or more specific issues merit more in-depth consideration, to convene, on an ad hoc basis, a workshop or other event on that theme, and/or mandate a consultant or group of experts to examine the subject matter and to report on their findings to the Working Group of the Parties;

(c) To oversee the collection and dissemination of good practices and innovative initiatives to promote the principles of the Convention through the Aarhus Good Practice online database;

(d) Subject to available resources, undertake a global review of the state of the art with respect to participatory tools and mechanisms for consulting the public on international decision-making and to share the outcomes of the review with Parties, stakeholders and interested international forums;

7. *Requests* the secretariat to provide upon request expert assistance, including, as appropriate, commenting on draft documents and expert participation at meetings or events organized by international forums, training sessions, workshops, learning centres or other platforms:

(a) To interested international forums seeking to make their processes more transparent and participatory;

(b) To individual Parties wishing to put in place tools or mechanisms to assist the public to participate more effectively in international forums, including when hosting an important conference of any international forum;

8. *Invites* Parties, Signatories, international and other organizations to [continue supporting the implementation of article 3, paragraph 7 of the Convention] [allocate sufficient funds:

(a) At the national level, to support the participation of the public before, during and in the follow-up to meetings and events of international forums;

(b) At the international level, to support international forums to promote more effective public participation in their projects, processes and policies;

(c) To the Convention's work programme, to support its activities on this topic, including the secretariat's expert assistance and capacity-building work, in order that it may respond usefully to the expected ongoing demand;]

9. *Welcomes* the offer of [France] [to continue] to lead the work on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums.